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Zhou, Min

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How Elite Chinese Students View Other Countries: Findings from a Survey in Three Top Beijing Universities

Min ZHOU

Abstract: This study examines Chinese university students' feelings towards foreign countries, using original high-quality survey data collected in 2014 at three top universities in Beijing. First, elite Chinese students' perceptions of specific countries are revealed. Being from top universities, these individuals will have great influence on China's future politics and international relations. It is thus important to gauge their perceptions of other countries. They generally feel warmly towards the European Union, Russia, and the United States, but harbour cold feelings towards Northeast Asian neighbours (Japan and the two Koreas). Second, this study finds that the effects of the socio-demographic and political factors underlying students' feelings differ greatly from country to country. I construct various social profiles of the students (dis)liking particular countries. Third, this study establishes a connection between nationalism and feelings towards particular countries. Chinese nationalism is not equally targeted at all other countries. While it elevates animosity mainly against Japan and the US, it promotes a closer rapport with North Korea and Russia.

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Keywords: China, Chinese nationalism, Chinese students, political ideology, public opinion

Dr. Min Zhou is an associate professor of Sociology at the University of Victoria. His research focuses on various forms and consequences of global social change. He has published articles on global economic networks, international organisations, global public opinion, and transnational social movements. His latest project investigates the role of social networks in political activities and labour markets in China.

E-mail: <minzhou@uvic.ca>

Introduction

There has been very scarce scientifically collected data on Chinese perceptions of foreign countries. As a result, we know very little about how the Chinese perceive other nations of the world, let alone how the perception of one country differs from another or how these views vary across different social groups. Most of what we know comes from anecdotal evidence that may not well represent the Chinese, and may even be misleading. One notable exception is the study by Gries and Sanders (2016), in which they find that Chinese netizens feel most warmly towards the European Union, followed by the United States, Russia, South Korea, North Korea, and lastly Japan. That study is based on an Internet survey, however. While it does indeed shed light on the perceptions of those active on the Internet, the convenience sample used limits its ability to be generalised.

This study¹ fills this gap. Using original survey data from strict probability sampling, it examines how students from three top universities in Beijing feel about six countries and territories, including major global powers – the EU, Russia, and the US – and important Northeast Asian neighbours – Japan, North Korea, and South Korea. This research also has the potential to generate new insights into Chinese nationalism. Nationalism and nationalist sentiment among the Chinese have received considerable attention in both the public media and academia. Research on nationalism in China is often criticised for its lack of solid empirical substance (Carlson 2009: 21).

A key concern about the perceived increase in Chinese nationalism is whether it will trigger aggression against other countries. Obviously, individuals do not hold the same feelings towards all foreign countries equally, and some of the latter are more likely to bear the brunt of China's popular nationalism. As it continues its rise in the global economy and international politics, China inevitably shares more common interest with certain countries while encountering more conflicts over real, historical, or symbolic matters with others. This empirical study will shed light, then, on whether elite students in China view other countries more as friends or foes.

1 This research was funded by an Insight Grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC) of Canada. The data used in this study are available online at: <www.minzhou.ca/data.html>.

For the purpose of this research, a large-scale survey was conducted at three top universities in Beijing – Peking University (PKU), Tsinghua University (THU), and Renmin University of China (RUC) – in June 2014. The survey collected information on students' feelings towards the EU, Japan, North Korea, Russia, South Korea, and the US. The choice of these six countries and territories was not random. In the pilot survey conducted at the same universities, these geographical locations were ranked as the top six that students perceive to be the most important in China's foreign relations (in the order of the US, Russia, the EU, Japan, North Korea, and South Korea). The three Beijing universities were chosen due to their prominent social and political influences. Students from these higher learning institutions often play a pioneering role in public opinions and social movements involving foreign countries (Yu and Zhao 2006). Moreover, the three are among the most prestigious in China and are "training grounds for the country's future elite" (Hoffmann and Larner 2013: 201). Their students are likely to assume leading future roles in society. Therefore, it is crucial to gauge their feelings towards foreign countries (Chen 2011; Sinkkonen 2013; Yu and Zhao 2006; Zhao 2003).

Using the original data, this study is intended to address two interrelated questions. First, it reveals and compares students' feelings towards different countries. Second, it employs multivariate regression techniques to examine what socio-demographic and political factors influence students' feelings towards a particular country and constructs different social profiles of the students liking or disliking particular ones.

Feelings towards Foreign Countries in China

Some scholars contend that nationalism is an important source of legitimacy for the Chinese government, and that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) often manipulates such sentiment to shore up its own governing of the country (Gries 2004; Wang 2012; Zhao 2004). At the same time, more and more scholars also realise that Chinese society is not merely passively influenced by the government. Public opinions and popular sentiments themselves also affect the government's foreign policies (Gries 2004; Johnston 2004). The Chinese leadership is increasingly sensitive to public perceptions of a given

country in making foreign policies that involve it (Gries et al. 2011). Some even assert that the Chinese government is increasingly willing to follow popular nationalistic sentiments and thus adopt confrontational and assertive behaviour against certain other countries (Zhao 2013). In light of this impact of public opinion on China's foreign policies, it is worth examining how the public feels about certain other countries and comparing how they are liked or disliked by the individuals in question.

Empirical studies have begun paying attention to popular feelings towards a particular country in today's China. For instance, there seems to be a popular basis for mistrust against the US (Gries and Sanders 2016), and nationalism is found to have an impact on tougher US policies (Gries et al. 2011). In contrast, others find no evidence of anti-American nationalism among elite students (Zhao 2002). Students view the US more as a superpower than as an enemy, and it is "difficult for radical anti-US nationalism to achieve domination in China" (Zhao 2002: 905). Various studies point out widespread anti-Japanese nationalism among the Chinese public (He 2007; Reilly 2012; Weiss 2014; Zhou and Wang 2016). This negative public sentiment is viewed as a powerful driver of China's Japan policy (Gries, Steiger, and Wang 2016). Based on a large Internet survey, Gries (2012) studies Chinese netizens' feelings towards the Koreas and reveals cold ones towards both states. Existing studies usually focus on the Chinese perception of a particular country and thus are unable to situate public opinions in a comparative perspective; that is, how the Chinese feel about one country relative to another. One notable exception is the aforementioned study by Gries and Sanders (2016), but theirs is based on a convenience sample from an Internet survey.

The Chinese government is particularly sensitive to public opinions from "students and young people in urban areas," as they are most likely to "participate in protest movements over foreign policy issues" (Sinkkonen 2013: 1046). Consequently, this segment of the population is "most likely of greatest concern to Chinese leaders" (Reilly 2012: 126). Meanwhile, the CCP increasingly tends to recruit its elite members or even future leaders from among highly educated young people – especially those from top universities. It is thus essential to gauge elite Chinese students' perceptions of foreign countries.

Potential Correlates of Feelings towards Foreign Countries

I draw on existing empirical studies on Chinese nationalism for potential factors underlying individuals' feelings towards certain foreign countries. Both socio-demographic and political factors have influence herein. Socio-demographic factors are those more observable, and "objective" attributes. In contrast, political factors are about individuals' political orientation and identity – hence they are less directly observable, and more "subjective."

Socio-Demographic Factors

Commonly studied socio-demographic correlates of Chinese nationalism include gender, age, residence, *hukou* (户口) type (urban or rural), family income, CCP membership, ethnic background (Han or non-Han minority), the university at which individuals study, and the region where they lived before coming to Beijing (see Gries et al. 2011; Gries and Sanders 2016; Hoffmann and Larner 2013; Sinkkonen 2013; Tang and Darr 2012; Zhou and Wang 2016).

The effects of these variables are not always consistent in the literature, however. While some studies claim that females are more nationalistic in China (Hoffmann and Larner 2013), most find no significant difference between genders (Gries 2012; Gries et al. 2011; Gries and Sanders 2016; Tang and Darr 2012; Sinkkonen 2013). The effect of age is also debated. Some find older Chinese to be more nationalistic (Hoffmann and Larner 2013), but others observe no effect of age (Gries and Sanders 2016). Individuals from rural areas are mostly found to be more nationalistic than their urban counterparts (Hoffmann and Larner 2013; Sinkkonen 2013; Tang and Darr 2012), but no difference between rural and urban residents is found in other cases (Gries et al. 2011; Gries and Sanders 2016). Income is usually found to be negatively related to nationalism, and better-off individuals display less such sentiment (Tang and Darr 2012).

Ethnicity is generally found to have no significant association with the level of nationalism (Gries and Sanders 2016; Sinkkonen 2013; Tang and Darr 2012). CCP members are often found to be more nationalistic than non-CCP members (Tang and Darr 2012; Sinkkonen 2013). In some cases, however, the latter demonstrate greater nationalism. For instance, non-CCP members prefer tougher

foreign policies against the US (Gries et al. 2011). The university at which participants study also matters for nationalism. Among the three elite ones, students from PKU are often found to be the least nationalistic, followed by those from RUC, while those from THU are the most nationalistic (Chen 2011; Sinkkonen 2013).

I contend that this mixed evidence is likely due to the neglect of the variation in the effects of the socio-demographic factors underlying feelings towards different countries. I do not assume that these socio-demographic factors affect students' feelings towards different countries in the same way. A factor's effect on feelings towards the US can, for example, be very different from that on those towards Russia. Due to the potentially differential effects of the same factors, the social profiles of the students who favour (or disfavour) particular countries can differ. For instance, it is possible that the social profile of pro-US students differs greatly from that of pro-Russia ones.

Political Factors

Political ideology and nationalist identity also influence individuals' feelings towards foreign countries. Political ideology (liberal or conservative) is likely to shape individuals' perceptions in this regard. For instance, it divides liberals and conservatives over foreign affairs in the US (Gries 2014). A similar ideological divide may also be discernible in China. Individuals with a conservative orientation prefer to maintain China's current system rather than carry out further reforms, whereas liberal-oriented ones put more emphasis on further such reforms than the stability of the current system. Political systems in liberal democratic countries are congruent with this liberal orientation, and are thus likely to be more appealing to the latter. Accordingly, liberal individuals may develop warmer feelings towards such countries. In contrast, to the conservatives who hope to maintain the stability of China's current system, the image of liberal democracies may be a less favourable one. I empirically explore, therefore, the possibility of an ideological divide in feelings towards respective countries.

Chinese nationalist identity, commonly defined as a belief in China's superiority over other nation states (Gries 2012: 50; Kosterman and Feshbach 1989: 261; Sinkkonen 2013: 1047), is often assumed to be closely related to anti-foreigner perceptions and sentiments (Gries et al. 2011; Gries, Steiger, and Wang 2016; Reilly 2012;

Wang 2012; Zhao 2004). Nevertheless, little attention has been paid to its potentially differing effect on feelings towards respective countries. Consequently, we do not know whether it always leads to worsening feelings towards all countries or if it can actually have no effect – or even promote positive feelings towards certain ones. I thus explicitly examine this relationship, and investigate whether nationalist identity is associated with negative feelings towards each and every other country. The revealed relationship will shed light on which ones are most likely to bear the brunt of Chinese nationalism.

Data and Variables

A large-scale survey was conducted at three top universities (PKU, THU, and RUC) in Beijing, in June 2014 (Zhou and Wang 2016). The survey collected information on students' feelings towards other countries, and the factors potentially affecting these. The survey selected participants according to a carefully designed procedure of probability sampling.

The sampling method used is a modified form of two-stage clustering sampling, based on the type of on-campus student dormitory. At all three universities, almost all students live on campus except for a very few married graduate ones. There are different types of dormitory room used, with one to six students living in them. To guarantee the representativeness of the final sample, we first sampled dormitory rooms from each room type, and then selected one or two students from each selected room. We chose one student from dormitory rooms with three or fewer students, and two students from dormitory rooms with four or more students to complete the questionnaires.

The varying probabilities for a student being selected in different room types require separate sampling. Eventually, the probability of a student being selected in the final sample is the product of the probabilities at two stages: that is, (1) the probability of each room being selected times (2) the probability of each person being selected from the room in question. We set this probability to be the sample size divided by the population size. In other words, in our sampling scheme all students have an equal chance of being selected in the final sample.

Take THU, for example. There are 3,811 double, 2,670 triple, and 3,528 quadruple rooms that altogether house over 29,700 stu-

dents between them. A total of 500 questionnaires were expected to be distributed at THU. To ensure that all the students had the same chance of being selected as survey participants, we calculated that 128 double, 135 triple, and 118 quadruple rooms should be selected. To select these, systematic sampling was applied within each type of dormitory room. Then one student in each of the selected double and triple rooms and two students in each of the selected quadruple ones were selected randomly by interviewers to complete the questionnaire. In so doing, every student at THU had the equal probability (0.017) of being selected in the sample. Similar sampling procedures were used at PKU and RUC too.

When conducting the survey we anticipated the potential problem of self-censorship, and tried our best to minimise its impact. The survey was totally anonymous and self-administered. The survey conductors left the questionnaires for the respondents to complete by themselves, and when coming back to collect the completed ones they mixed the returned questionnaires together in a large envelope. There is no way to match completed questionnaires with specific individuals. Respondents were informed of this total anonymity before completing questionnaires.

The data contain 1,458 students in total; among them, 504 from PKU, 467 from THU, and 487 from RUC. The sample consists of 788 male students (54.05 per cent) and 670 female students (45.95 per cent). Sampled students are from all 22 of China's provinces, five autonomous regions, four municipalities, two special administrative regions (Hong Kong and Macau), and from Taiwan. The average age is 22 years old. Undergraduate and graduate students account for 67 per cent and 33 per cent of the participants, respectively. Sampled students are predominantly Han nationals (89.71 per cent), with the remaining 10.29 per cent from minority ethnic groups. These numbers are consistent with the overall profile of the student body in these universities. Because of the carefully designed probability sampling, the final sample represents well the student population of the three universities.

Dependent Variable

The feeling towards a particular country is captured by the question: "How do you feel about [the name of the country] in general?" I measure the responses on the following five-point scale: "Dislike it

very much” (1); “Dislike it somewhat” (2); “Neutral” (3); “Like it somewhat” (4); and, “Like it very much” (5). Hence higher scores suggest warmer feelings towards a particular country, while lower ones indicate more negative such sentiments.

Independent Variables

Gender is a binary variable, with males coded as 1 and females as 0. Age is measured in years. Residence or *hukou* type is binary, with rural residents coded as 1 and urban ones as 0. Family income is measured through the question: “How much is your parents’ total monthly income approximately?” The possible responses are situated on a nine-point scale: lower than CNY 1,000 (1); CNY 1,000–2,000 (2); CNY 2,000–4,000 (3); CNY 4,000–6,000 (4); CNY 6,000–8,000 (5); CNY 8,000–10,000 (6); CNY 10,000–15,000 (7); CNY 15,000–20,000 (8); and, over CNY 20,000 (9). A larger number indicates greater family income.

CCP membership is a binary variable, with 1 indicating CCP member and 0 non-CCP member. Ethnicity is measured as a binary variable, with Han coded as 1 and non-Han as 0. University type is a set of dummy variables; I use PKU as the reference group, and include RUC and THU in the analysis. Region is measured by a series of dummy variables. I use the commonly recognised geographic regions in mainland China including “East China” (Shanghai, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Anhui, Fujian, Jiangxi, and Shandong), “Northeast China” (Liaoning, Jilin, and Heilongjiang), “North China” (Beijing, Tianjin, Hebei, Shanxi, and Inner Mongolia), “Central China” (Henan, Hubei, and Hunan), “South China” (Guangdong, Guangxi, and Hainan), “Northwest China” (Shaanxi, Gansu, Qinghai, Ningxia, and Xinjiang), and “Southwest China” (Chongqing, Sichuan, Guizhou, Yunnan, and Tibet). Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan are not directly governed by the Chinese government, and are collectively classified as “other.”

Political ideology is self-reported, and based on the question: “Between maintaining stability (维护稳定, *weihu wending*) and deepening reforms (深化改革, *shenhua gaige*), which one do you think is more important for today’s China?” Those who emphasise stability are considered as conservative, whereas those who prefer reforms are coded as liberal. I measure nationalist identity by two questions used in the National Identity module of the International Social Survey

Program: (1) I would rather be a citizen of China than of any other country and (2) The world would be a better place if other countries were more like China. Responses are situated on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”). I use factor analysis to create a composite variable out of the two questions, so as to capture the level of nationalist identity.

Results

Comparison of Feelings towards Different Countries

Table 1 below summarises all the variables used in the analysis. On average students’ feelings towards the six countries and territories are ranked as follows (from the most positive to the most negative): Russia, the EU, the US, South Korea, Japan, and finally North Korea. Given the considerable attention paid to China’s anti-Japanese sentiments and protests in the existing literature and mass media, we would have thought Chinese students dislike Japan the most. Surprisingly, overall students hold the most negative feelings towards North Korea, a long-time ally of China (at least in the latter’s official discourse). Since these feelings are measured on a five-point scale and 3 is the middle point, scores above 3 suggest positive feelings and scores below it indicate negative ones. We can see that students generally hold positive feelings towards Russia, the EU, and the US while being negative about the three neighbours of Japan, North Korea, and South Korea.

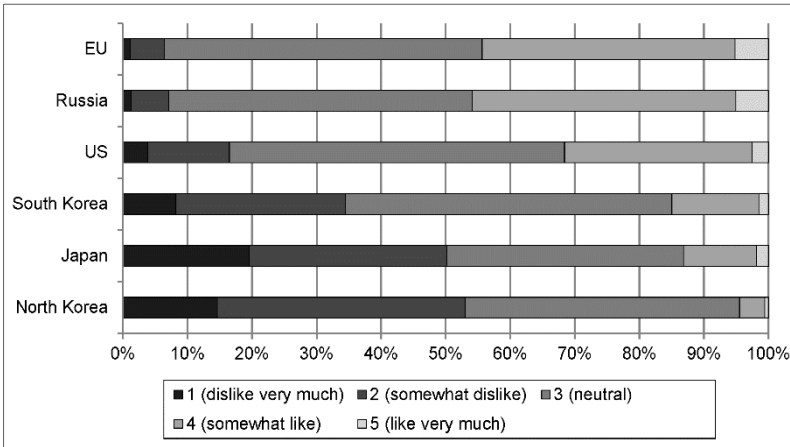
Figure 1 below displays the comparison of students’ feelings towards the six countries and territories. Both the EU and Russia are well liked by the surveyed students, with very few disliking either. Between the two, while slightly more students like Russia there are also slightly more who dislike it too. Hence, there is somewhat more variation in students’ feelings towards Russia than the EU. At the bottom of the rankings, North Korea and Japan are the least-liked countries. Japan receives the largest number of “dislike very much” responses, whereas North Korea has the highest percentage of dislike overall (including “dislike very much” and “somewhat dislike”). Feelings towards Japan are relatively more polarised, as there are also more students liking that country as compared to North Korea. While negative feelings towards the island nation are well document-

ed in the literature on anti-Japanese sentiments (Gries, Steiger, and Wang 2016; He 2007; Reilly 2012; Weiss 2014), the revealed cold feelings towards North Korea definitely merit further research.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Variables Used in the Analysis

Variables	Mean	Std. Dev.	Minimum	Maximum
Feelings towards the EU	3.420	.722	1	5
Feelings towards the US	3.138	.810	1	5
Feelings towards Russia	3.427	.734	1	5
Feelings towards Japan	2.453	.989	1	5
Feelings towards South Korea	2.738	.847	1	5
Feelings towards North Korea	2.375	.801	1	5
Age	21.808	2.768	17	38
Gender (male)	.540	.499	0	1
Ethnicity (Han)	.904	.295	0	1
Residence (rural)	.217	.412	0	1
Family income	5.222	2.003	1	9
CCP membership	.314	.464	0	1
Political ideology (conservative)	.419	.494	0	1
Nationalism	0	1	-2.398	2.077
Region:				
East China	.270	.444	0	1
Northeast China	.097	.297	0	1
North China	.192	.394	0	1
Central China	.161	.368	0	1
South China	.079	.255	0	1
Southwest China	.114	.318	0	1
Northwest China	.077	.266	0	1
Other (non-mainland China)	.010	.101	0	1

Figure 1: Feelings towards the Six Countries and Territories



Socio-Demographic Correlates of Feelings towards Particular Countries

Next, I employ multivariate regression techniques to examine the effects of various factors on students' feelings towards particular countries. Because the dependent variable is on a five-point scale and thus an ordinal variable, I choose ordinal logistic regression and apply it to the six countries and territories individually. Results are presented in Table 2 below.

Some independent variables have statistically significant effects, while others do not. Moreover, the same independent variable does not always have the same effect across all countries. Feelings towards different countries are associated with different combinations of socio-demographic factors. Based on the results in Table 2 below, below I discuss how these effects differ from one country to another:

Gender. This has a significant effect on feelings towards all countries except North Korea. Specifically, female students hold more positive feelings towards the EU, the US, Japan, and South Korea than their male counterparts. In contrast, male students tend to like Russia more than female students do. There is no gender difference in feelings towards North Korea.

Age. This only shows a significant effect on feelings towards the US and Japan. Older students develop more positive feelings toward

those two countries. Age shows no effect on feelings towards the other ones studied.

Table 2. Ordinal Logistic Regression of Feelings towards Particular Countries

Variable	EU	US	Russia
Gender (male)	-.615*** (.109)	-.529*** (.108)	.410*** (.109)
Age	-.003 (.021)	.107*** (.022)	.002 (.021)
Residence (rural)	.009 (.139)	.053 (.136)	.150 (.137)
Family income	.083** (.029)	.074** (.028)	-.007 (.029)
Ethnicity (Han)	-.183 (.182)	.155 (.177)	-.199 (.179)
CCP membership	-.058 (.123)	-.418** (.124)	-.241* (.121)
University: Reference group: PKU			
RUC	-.091 (.128)	.137 (.127)	.184 (.129)
THU	-.175 (.132)	-.154 (.131)	-.345** (.131)
Region: Reference group: Central China			
East China	.088 (.161)	-.021 (.161)	.020 (.163)
Northeast China	-.127 (.177)	-.100 (.206)	.341 (.208)
North China	-.084 (.177)	.086 (.176)	.159 (.177)
South China	.165 (.229)	.052 (.229)	-.055 (.235)
Southwest China	.051 (.202)	.319 (.198)	-.025 (.201)
Northwest China	-.353 (.229)	.176 (.223)	.199 (.227)
Non-mainland China	1.158 (.708)	.824 (.674)	-1.432* (.609)
R ²	.101	.128	.083

Variable	Japan	S. Korea	N. Korea
Gender (male)	-.554*** (.104)	-.494*** (.107)	-.022 (.105)
Age	.059** (.021)	.036 (.021)	-.030 (.021)
Residence (rural)	-.151 (.127)	.287 (.163)	.022 (.131)
Family income	.066* (.027)	-.025 (.028)	-.065* (.028)
Ethnicity (Han)	-.043 (.172)	.055 (.178)	-.152 (.182)
CCP membership	-.318** (.117)	.120 (.121)	-.073 (.120)
University: Reference group: PKU			
RUC	-.060 (.121)	.128 (.126)	.347** (.124)
THU	-.093 (.125)	-.280* (.128)	.352** (.133)
Region: Reference group: Central China			
East China	.017 (.154)	.017 (.159)	-.078 (.156)
Northeast China	-.192 (.203)	.035 (.204)	.056 (.203)
North China	-.077 (.168)	.128 (.175)	.225 (.173)
South China	.287 (.222)	.418 (.235)	.121 (.229)
Southwest China	.316 (.189)	.053 (.197)	.136 (.195)
Northwest China	-.045 (.219)	.237 (.221)	-.080 (.223)
Non-mainland China	1.654** (.587)	.803 (.622)	.244 (.578)
R ²	.103	.079	.039

Notes: (1) N = 1458; (2) numbers in parentheses are standard errors; (3) from two-tailed tests, * P<.05; ** P<.01; *** P<.001.

Residence (*hukou*) type. There is no difference in feelings towards any of the countries between urban and rural students.

Family income. This has a significantly positive effect on the EU, the US, and Japan, whereas it shows a significantly negative ef-

fect on North Korea. It reveals no effect on Russia and South Korea. Students from better-off families tend to like the EU, the US, and Japan more, while those from less well-off ones feel more warmly towards North Korea.

Ethnicity. There is no difference in feelings towards any of the six countries and territories between Han students and those from minority ethnic groups.

CCP membership. This shows a significantly negative effect on feelings towards the US, Russia, and Japan, while it has no effect on those towards the EU, South Korea, and North Korea.

University. There are no differences in students' feelings across the three universities regarding the EU, the US, and Japan. Nevertheless, feelings towards Russia and the two Koreas differ between the respective schools. Students from PKU adopt more negative feelings towards North Korea than those from THU and RUC. Tsinghua students hold colder feelings towards Russia and South Korea, compared with those from the other two universities.

Region. No significant differences are found between the major regions within mainland China. However, there are significant differences between students from mainland China and those from outside it (including Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan) in their feelings towards Japan and Russia. Students from outside mainland China like Japan significantly more than mainland Chinese ones do. Meanwhile, the former tend to show less warm feelings towards Russia.

Political Correlates of Feelings towards Particular Countries

I further investigate how students' political orientation, such as ideology and nationalism, is related to feelings towards other countries. With all the socio-demographic variables held under control, I incorporate political ideology and nationalist identity into the ordinal logistic regression model. Estimated results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Ordinal Logistic Regression including Political Ideology and Nationalist Identity

Variable	EU	US	Russia
Gender (male)	-.592*** (.114)	-.446*** (.113)	.416*** (.114)
Age	-.016 (.023)	.082*** (.023)	.018 (.022)
Residence (rural)	-.021 (.145)	.019 (.142)	.184 (.144)
Family income	.086** (.030)	.060* (.029)	.008 (.030)
Ethnicity (Han)	-.133 (.190)	.225 (.186)	-.241 (.187)
CCP membership	-.022 (.130)	-.331** (.129)	-.305* (.129)
University: Reference group: PKU			
RUC	-.127 (.134)	.132 (.133)	.197 (.135)
THU	-.233 (.137)	-.218 (.136)	-.364** (.136)
Region: Reference group: Central China			
East China	.114 (.168)	-.046 (.167)	.055 (.169)
Northeast China	-.062 (.218)	-.030 (.216)	.341 (.217)
North China	-.096 (.185)	.128 (.185)	.199 (.184)
South China	.149 (.239)	-.107 (.237)	-.034 (.244)
Southwest China	.005 (.210)	.330 (.207)	-.011 (.211)
Northwest China	-.370 (.241)	.228 (.235)	.209 (.237)
Non-mainland China	1.114 (.710)	.789 (.682)	-1.400* (.603)
Ideology (conservative)	-.453*** (.112)	-.416*** (.111)	-.140 (.111)
Nationalism	-.078 (.058)	-.370*** (.058)	.303*** (.058)
R ²	.141	.221	.140

Variable	Japan	S. Korea	N. Korea
Gender (male)	-.497*** (.109)	-.477*** (.112)	-.097 (.110)
Age	.043* (.021)	.027 (.022)	-.026 (.022)
Residence (rural)	-.172 (.134)	.256 (.139)	.007 (.138)
Family income	.058* (.028)	-.025 (.029)	-.061* (.029)
Ethnicity (Han)	-.071 (.179)	.008 (.185)	-.238 (.191)
CCP membership	-.240* (.121)	.116 (.126)	-.117 (.125)
University: Reference group: PKU			
RUC	-.048 (.127)	.122 (.132)	.306* (.130)
THU	-.132 (.130)	-.338* (.132)	.299* (.133)
Region: Reference group: Central China			
East China	.079 (.161)	.037 (.165)	.015 (.162)
Northeast China	-.110 (.213)	.023 (.213)	.148 (.210)
North China	.044 (.176)	.144 (.182)	.332 (.180)
South China	.300 (.230)	.426 (.242)	.206 (.237)
Southwest China	.356 (.196)	.009 (.204)	.158 (.204)
Northwest China	.023 (.230)	.200 (.231)	-.082 (.233)
Non-mainland China	1.680** (.602)	.820 (.622)	.477 (.576)
Ideology (conservative)	-.294** (.105)	-.207 (.108)	.039 (.107)
Nationalism	-.430*** (.055)	-.031 (.056)	.268*** (.056)
R ²	.209	.087	.080

Notes: (1) N = 1458; (2) numbers in parentheses are standard errors; (3) from two-tailed tests, * P<.05; ** P<.01; *** P<.001; (4) the reference group for the ideology variable is liberal.

The effects of the socio-demographic variables are substantively the same as discussed above. Here I focus on the effects of the two newly added political variables:

Political ideology. I distinguish between conservative and liberal orientations. Between maintaining stability and deepening reforms, conservative students give more priority to stability while liberal students prefer more reforms. Political conservatism is significantly related to the dislike of the EU, the US, and Japan, while having no significant effect on feelings towards Russia and the two Koreas. Conservative students are more likely to dislike the EU, the US, and Japan, whereas liberal students tend to hold warmer feelings towards the three.

Nationalist identity. The effect of this shows three diverging patterns. First, nationalist identity has a significantly negative effect on feelings towards the US and Japan; second, it displays a significantly positive effect on feelings towards Russia and North Korea; third, it has no significant relationship with feelings towards the EU and South Korea. Hence more nationalistic individuals are likely to develop greater negative feelings towards the US and Japan, while showing warmer ones towards Russia and North Korea.

The social profile of the students who (dis)like the US and Japan is particularly distinguishable. In comparison with other countries, a greater number of socio-demographic and political variables have significant effects on feelings towards these two countries and can explain the increased variation among students (i.e. greater R^2 of the models). In other words, feelings towards the US and Japan display more predictable patterns. In contrast, feelings towards the two Koreas are not so set among students and thus we are less able to predict them using students' characteristics. The predictability of feelings towards the EU and Russia is somewhere in between these two poles.

Conclusion and Discussion

This study makes three main contributions to the literature. First, it reveals elite Chinese students' perceptions of specific countries using high-quality representative data. These individuals are from top universities, and will have great influence on China's future politics and international relations. It is thus important to gauge their perceptions of other countries. They generally feel warmly towards Russia, the

EU, and the US, but harbour cold feelings towards the three North-east Asian neighbours.

Second, this study finds that the effects of the socio-demographic and political factors on students' feelings differ greatly from country to country. Based on the results presented in this paper, social profiles of the students (dis)liking particular countries can be constructed. These social profiles are summarised in Table 4 below. Third, this study establishes a clear connection between Chinese nationalism and feelings towards particular countries. Such sentiment is not equally targeted at all other countries. While it elevates animosity against Japan and the US, it promotes a closer rapport with Russia and North Korea.

Table 4. The Correlates of Feelings towards Particular Countries

Feelings towards:	EU	US	Russia	Japan	S. Korea	N. Korea
Male	–	–	+	–	–	
Female	+	+	–	+	+	
Age		+		+		
Family income	+	+		+		–
CCP member		–	–	–		
Mainland China			+	–		
Non-mainland			–	+		
Conservative	–	–		–		
Liberal	+	+		+		
Nationalism		–	+	–		+

Notes: (1) +: positive effect; –: negative effect; blank cell: no effect; (2) THU students hold more negative feelings towards Russia and South Korea, while PKU ones demonstrate more negative feelings towards specifically North Korea; (3) there are no significant differences between rural and urban students or between Han and non-Han students.

Several patterns are worthy of closer attention here, and call for further in-depth research. Female students show a greater liking of Western or developed countries and territories while male students tend to feel closer to Russia. In future, it would be interesting to dig deeper into this gender difference. For instance, the soft power of Western or developed countries – such as American, European, Japanese, and South Korean popular cultures – may be more appealing to women than men in China, thereby constructing a more attractive

image of these countries among the former. Why men show warmer feelings towards Russia than women is also an intriguing topic worth investigating.

Older students display warmer feelings towards the US and Japan. In future research, we may wish to disentangle the cohort effect and the age effect to better understand this finding. We would like to discover whether this is due to the difference in cohorts (e.g. older cohorts were exposed to less nationalist education and propaganda than younger ones were) or the difference in age (e.g. as students get older, they gradually see the US and Japan differently and their impressions of the two countries improve).

Students from wealthier family backgrounds tend to like Western and developed countries more, whereas those from poorer families hold warmer feelings towards North Korea. Western and Japanese popular culture and sociopolitical systems may appeal more to affluent individuals. For the less well-off, they are more likely to be losing out in China's socio-economic transformations. The image of North Korea, often reminiscent of pre-reform China, is thus probably more likely to win them over.

CCP members tend to develop less favourable feelings towards China's potential geopolitical competitors, such as the US, Russia, and Japan. The EU and the two Koreas are much less likely to pose a challenge to China, and CCP members and non-members do not differ in their feelings towards these countries and territories. Geopolitics may have a greater impact on perceptions of foreign countries for CCP members than for non-members.

Mainland Chinese students hold significantly warmer feelings towards Russia and colder ones towards Japan than their non-mainland counterparts do. This result may suggest that mainland China's education and media construct a more favourable image of Russia and a more negative one of Japan when compared with those impressions conveyed outside mainland China.

Conservative students are more likely to dislike liberal democratic countries and territories such as the EU, the US, and Japan. The disliking of liberal democracies is hence congruent with their personal conservative orientation. In contrast, liberal students tend to like these countries and territories more. Liberal students hope to see more reforms in China, and the liberal democratic models in place in the EU, the US, and Japan may be more appealing to them.

Nationalism is not related to students' feelings towards all countries in the same way. In particular, Japan and the US are most likely to bear the brunt of Chinese nationalist fervour. Nationalistic students hold more negative sentiments towards these two countries, and probably see them as threats or even enemies. Russia and North Korea actually benefit from Chinese nationalism, and thus may be perceived by students holding such feelings as potential allies (especially ones against the US and Japan).

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